



## CATAWBA COUNTY

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June 6, 2011

Dear Citizens of Catawba County:

I am pleased to present to you the Catawba County Fiscal Year 2011/12 budget. The budget lowers the property tax to a revenue neutral rate of 53 cents as a result of revaluation, consistent with the Board of Commissioners' goal to maintain County services and momentum as much as possible without a property tax increase. This was a difficult budget to prepare as the local economy continues to recover slowly, and state revenues remain tenuous. The budget decreases County operations cost by 3.42 percent, and the total budget by 2.81 percent. County departments continue to tighten their belts as the budget reduces departmental expenses by \$1.7 million, 29 positions are eliminated, and 4 positions have reduced hours. Most outside agencies are also reduced 5 percent. Cumulative reductions in County spending over the past 4 years now equal \$10.5 million, and have impacted 9 percent of the County workforce.

While reductions in some services continue to be necessary, the budget places a high priority on the critical areas of education, public safety, and economic development. Investments in public school and community college operations are maintained by diverting \$1.55 million in funds previously dedicated to future school construction projects, made possible by County funding of needed school and community college renovations and building the past several years. Even with this diversion, new construction projects totaling \$68.9 million are planned over the 2012 to 2015 period without a property tax increase. The budget funds several roofing and general maintenance projects within the three school districts, and necessary upgrades to CVCC.

One new Narcotics Investigator is included and two new road patrol deputies could be hired at midyear subject to response times. Funds are set aside for an expansion of Emergency Medical Services, also subject to response times, and for a much needed Animal Shelter expansion. Funds are also dedicated towards the expansion of the Justice Center and Public Safety Center to provide much needed court related space, technology enhancements and the housing of the 911 Emergency Communications Center, Emergency Operations Center, and Emergency Services, as promised with the quarter cent sales tax referendum.

The revaluation of property resulted in relatively flat values for the County's fire districts, with revenue neutral property tax rates within hundredths of a penny of the current rates. All fire districts are maintained at their current rates. Funding to Rescue Squads is reduced by two percent, but holds harmless Emergency Medical Response funding and should not impact the level of service provided to citizens.

*"Keeping the Spirit Alive Since 1842!"*

Economic development is supported by funding for the Economic Development Commission, the Chamber's Visitor Information Center and Edison Project to promote small business, and a partnership with Conover, Hickory, Maiden and Catawba for a multi-jurisdictional business park.

The budget maintains current service levels for County Parks and Libraries. While these services are not mandated, they provide citizens with valuable resources as well as educational and recreational activities. Funds are set aside toward the cost of a new Sherrills Ford branch library from the temporary diversion of ½ cent of property tax previously dedicated to water and sewer projects.

I thank my fellow County Commissioners and the citizens of Catawba County for their trust and support of our continued efforts to meet our citizens' needs.

Sincerely,

CATAWBA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katherine W. Barnes".

Katherine W. Barnes, Chair